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ABSTRACT

Counselor development is a topic of great interest to both trainers and counselors-in-training. Several models of counselor development as presented in the literature are described. Recent research has investigated developmental factors relating to counselor identity and sense of self-efficacy from a trainee perspective. A model of five recurring themes pertaining to counselor development is proposed: Shattering Experiences, Losing (Old) Sense of Self, Transition, New Sense of Self, and Counselor Identity. Few differences exist between career counselors and personal counselors. Implications for training and practice are discussed. (Contains 16 references.) (GCP)

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Developmental Themes and Self-Efficacy for Career Counsellors

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People training to be counsellors need to develop both competence and confidence. Competence is addressed through training and courses, practice, performance feedback, super-vision, self-reflection, discussion, reading, and other knowledge- and skill-oriented activities. The development of confidence is much more challenging. How do trainees come to believe in their ability to be a counsellor? As an instructor in a graduate counselling program, I have been intrigued with the variety and changes in people's beliefs about their sense of "self-as-counsellor." Many of my observations would fit into a developmental context, a movement forward over time. Lerner (1986) states that there are three minimal elements in the concept of development, regardless of philosophical or theoretical orientation: (1) development always implies change of some sort, (2) the change is organized systematically, and (3) the change involves succession over time.

No developmental model specifically for career counsellors could be located. There are a number of models of counsellor development, including those proposed by Hill, Charles, and Reed (1981), Stoltenberg, (1981), Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth (1982), Friedman and Kaslow (1986), and Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987). Some common elements are evident in these models. First, they present between three and six relatively discrete stages of counsellor development. Second, movement through the stages occurs in a generally linear fashion. And third, counsellor growth is most often described in the context of the training program, supervision, or the supervisory relationship.

These models conceptualize the process as being systematic or orderly, which is not consistent with my own observations. I have observed varying patterns: some trainees seem to make steady progress, others start off well but then seem to regress, still others experience a fairly long plateau where there is not much movement at all. Also, the above models focus largely on supervision or internship, with little consideration of the trainee's perspective, or of personal influences on development.

Two recent studies have investigated counsellor development using a qualitative approach. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992) pointed out that little had been written about normative development from a counsellor's perspective. They conducted their research with 100 therapists and counsellors with graduate degrees (or in graduate programs) in counselling, whose counselling experience ranged from one to forty years. The

research team conducted semi-structured interviews of 60 to 90 minutes, using a 23-item questionnaire they had developed. The questions were intended to capture the style and method of the practitioner, as well as the major factors in creating this style and method.

From their results Skovholt and Ronnestad proposed an eight-stage model of professional development. The stages were named as follows: Conventional, Transition to Professional Training, Imitation of Experts, Conditional Autonomy, Exploration, Integration, Individuation, and Integrity. The authors concluded that counsellor development involves a movement from reliance on external authority to reliance on internal authority. This process occurs throughout the counsellor's interaction with multiple sources of influence over a long period of time. They suggested that a central element distinguishing development from stagnation or impairment is the presence (or absence) and awareness of the practitioner's own ongoing internalized development.

Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1994) asked nine doctoral-level trainees what experiences in the doctoral internship had contributed significantly to their effectiveness as counsellors. Analysis of the interview data resulted in a cyclical model of counsellor development, which was named Becoming Empowered. There were four recurring sequential themes: Experiencing Dissonance, Responding to Dissonance, Relating to Supervision, and Feeling Empowered. The model, including the four main themes and related subthemes, portrays increasing effectiveness or competence. However, although not confined to supervision, the research is nevertheless limited to the internship context, and does not include personal factors that might be affecting the trainees' experience.

One thing consistently observed with counselling trainees is that moment of "getting it," when they truly see themselves as counsellors. My research colleague Norah Trace (formerly Andersen) and I call this their *counsellor identity* (Marshall and Andersen 1995; 1996). This is their own realization that, yes, they can do this, and often comes after a period of self-doubt, or at least wondering. It may come near the beginning of the trainees' program, perhaps in initial courses. It may come later, when they are in practice settings. What we have noted, subsequent to this "identification," is a definite shift in their confidence and a lessening of their general anxiety about being

able to counsel. We began our research wondering whether the trainees themselves could identify this moment of change.

The three studies described below are part of a continuing research project on counsellor development initiated more than six years ago. The project involves several different sources of data from first-year counselling graduate-program trainees: interviews, course journals, observations, and scores on a standardized measure of self-efficacy, the Counseling Self-Estimate Inventory (Larson et al. 1992).

Study #1: Themes of development and self-efficacy

We initially interviewed five students in a graduate training program (Marshall and Andersen 1995). In order to minimize our influence as trainers and researchers, we asked only one open-ended question: "What is your experience of the process of becoming a counsellor?" The interviews lasted from 60 to 75 minutes and were transcribed for analysis. We then extracted 23 themes and subthemes relating to their shared experiences (see table 1).

All the trainees identified a realization or recognition of what we have called *counsellor identity,* the belief that they can be a counsellor, that they can "do it." One participant said "...coming through that [working with a volunteer client], I was able to realize, yeah, I can do this." This recognition is similar to what Bandura (1989) calls "self efficacy," the belief in one's ability to perform given behaviours successfully. It was a central concept for the trainee participants.

In addition to shared themes focusing on professional development, there were also a number of personal themes, such as the impact of personal growth, awareness of their own beliefs and values, similarity to previous helping training, and the importance of self-care.

All participants commented positively about having the opportunity to reflect on their experience in the training program. We also noticed that new insights and conceptual shifts occurred during the actual research interview. For example, one participant observed that she had a clearer picture of her priorities as she described her process.

In contrast to findings in other counsellor development models, the participants described recurring cycles or themes of

development, not orderly stages. This may, in part, be related to the participants' diversity of training and levels of practical experience. Factors such as years of helping experience or the intense training format could perhaps be more influential in their development.

Table 1 Counsellor trainees' developmental themes and sub-themes

- Recognition of counsellor identity
  - Counsellor development is an ongoing process
  - Counselling style becoming more natural
- Increased confidence
  - Greater willingness to take risks
- Increased competence
  - Feelings of incompetence
- Expanded knowledge
- Increased skill level
  - Desire for more supervised practice
- Intense training experience
  - Not enough time for practice
  - Intellectually stimulating
- Increased awareness of own process
- Increased awareness of own beliefs and values
- Personal growth
- Recognition of constraints to counselling
- Self-care
- Recognition of boundaries in the counselling relationship
- Accessing support
  - Small collegial support groups
- Attaining balance
- Similarities to other training experiences

Study #2: Collaborative reflection

Our subsequent research studies were more focused on the process of development, now that we had identified a number of relevant themes. In our second study (Marshall and Andersen 1996) we added a new collaborative step to the interview analysis. What we have called *collaborative reflection* involved inviting the trainee participants into the interview analysis process in an active and integrative manner. After interviewing and extracting content themes from the interview transcript,

we prepared a list of the themes in random order. The trainees were then asked to organize them in whatever arrangement best illustrated their developmental experience. As researchers, we also arranged the participants' themes in a manner we thought illustrated their process. The second part of the collaborative reflection process consisted of a joint debriefing session in which the developmental models were discussed.

The resultant model of the trainees' developmental process involves a continuously circular movement through five major themes:

- Shattering Experiences
- Losing Sense of Self
- Transition
- New Sense of Self
- Counsellor Identity (Self-efficacy)

Individual trainees' themes were associated with one of these major themes, or with the process itself. The trainees' models included various depictions and specific individual themes relating to shattering (difficult or challenging) counselling situations, the letting go of old roles and behaviours, the transitional process, the focus on integrating new understandings that are so much a part of counsellor trainees' experiences, and a sense of counsellor identity. These major themes have been acknowledged by all participants in our research to date, and have been reported to have a significant impact on their development.

There are similarities between our model and the one proposed by Sawatzky, Jevne, and Clark (1994). There is some overlap between our major themes and three of their major themes: Experiencing Dissonance, Responding to Dissonance, and Becoming Empowered. Also, both models depict an ongoing, circular process of counsellor development. However, our trainees' descriptions go considerably beyond effectiveness and supervision to include personal as well as professional change throughout the entire process. This is all-encompassing change, or what Bruss and Kopala have called a "transformation of identity at both a professional and personal level" (1993: 685).

This new collaborative reflection step has dramatically influenced our own and trainees' understanding of counsellor development. It has allowed the trainees to become consciously

involved in explicating their perspective on their own experience of growth.

Study #3: Focus on career counselling

My current research focus is on the similarities and differences experienced by trainees related to career counselling identity (or self-efficacy). Within an interview and debriefing methodology similar to that described above, trainees are being asked to consider developmental similarities and differences between career and personal counselling. Initial findings indicate similar patterns regarding shattering experiences, transitions, and realization of identity. However, there is more focus on the management of career-related information. Also, there is an increased emphasis on counselling outcome. A number of trainees have indicated that the difference between career and personal counselling is more one of emphasis than content or process, and that it is difficult to distinguish any different developmental path. This view has received increasing support (Betz and Corning 1993; Richardson 1996). However, most of our research participants to date consider that they were trained in personal counselling first. More research is needed with participants trained as career counsellors first, or concurrently.

Implications for training and practice

The above research findings highlight the importance of attending to developmental issues in training counsellors. Periodic discussion and reflection about experiences in the training program can encourage trainees to acknowledge the progress and changes they have made, and help them reaffirm or modify their goals in training. To date, few differences between career counsellors and personal counsellors have been identified, and there is some question as to the present utility of this traditional dichotomy.

We have found that trainees can easily relate to our developmental model of five recurring themes: Shattering Experiences, Losing (Old) Sense of Self, Transition, New Sense of Self, Counsellor Identity. This relatively simple model is appropriate to introduce at even the early stages of a training program, along with more specific individual themes. Trainees can then be encouraged to reflect more fully on their individual experiences as they progress through their training. Increasingly more complex models and themes can be explored over time.

Our findings would suggest that each training program, as well as each individual trainee, has particular critical points or times for reflection, integration, and adjustment. We recommend that counsellor educators and trainers plan time for developmental monitoring within their programs. Attention can then be directed where it is needed individually. This reflection time would also serve as a constructive model for continuing professional self-evaluation and renewal, similar to Schon's concept of the *reflective practitioner* (1983). If it becomes a habit in training, it is more likely to continue once training is over and the counsellor is in the field.

Distance and intensive-format programs have particular constraints. Trainees find it helpful to have advance information, and strategies for maximizing growth while minimizing stress.

As Bruss and Kopala (1993) suggest, it would also be important to discuss barriers or "impingements" to the process of healthy professional development. Issues such as constant evaluation, peer pressure, ambiguous definitions of competence, and unrealistic expectations could be explored. There is much that is not said directly in training programs. A climate of inquiry and open discussion would do much to dispel the myths and anxieties that are present.

In our research to date, all trainees have spoken of both personal and professional elements in their growth. Participants have identified personal change and processing as a critical factor in their development. Sometimes personal and professional themes are experienced together, at other times more separately. This dual focus could be represented in a double helix model, with the two strands of personal and professional development intersecting at critical points. This is yet another possibility for further exploration.

It has always been a challenge to respond to individual trainees' developmental paths within the somewhat limiting structure of graduate school training sequences. Our goal is to make the process of becoming a counsellor more conscious, so that trainees can make meaning of their experience and identify skills or issues that need attention, while still acknowledging the overall context of their current developmental process.

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